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SUBJECT: KHARTOUM CDA FERNANDEZ' AUGUST 14 MEETING WITH ARAB LEAGUE'S HISHAM YOUSEF

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Stuart Jones
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and introduction. Visiting Khartoum Charge d'Affairs Alberto Fernandez met with Hisham Yousef, Chief of Staff to Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa, on August 14 in Cairo. Yousef expressed optimism that Darfur is "on the right track" and has a better chance of successful resolution than other regional issues (e.g. Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). Yousef said he would like to see greater focus on long-term political and economic development, as opposed to security alone. In addition, he said more attention should be paid to the North-South conflict now that the Darfur situation appears to be stabilizing. CDA Fernandez said that there is a window of opportunity for real progress, but it may close quickly. End summary.

¶2. (C) Yousef told CDA Fernandez that the Addis Ababa conference of November 2006 had put things on "the right track." He was concerned, however, that continued focus on security issues would be at the detriment of other critical tracks, i.e. political and economic. In addition, the focus should be shifted from Darfur to the north-south divide. Yousef said that the Arab League had provided \$20 million in economic assistance, despite criticism from some member states that the Arab League was merely "financing failure."

¶3. (C) CDA Fernandez took these points, and added that as the focus shifts from security to economic development, donor states (such as the USG, which is currently providing \$1 billion in food assistance) need to shift to long term development projects and away from subsistence programs. He added that the Sudanese Government needs to do a better job of facilitating movement of aid - there are currently 1000 United Nations shipping containers sitting in Port Sudan. This delay can partially be attributed to bureaucratic, but there is more the GOS can do.

¶4. (C) Yousef said a priority for the Arab League is supporting Sudanese unity. There must be a way to keep unity the most attractive option, especially for the south. The Arab world alone cannot do this, and the USG and international community are critical in this regard. It ultimately is the decision of the Sudanese people, Yousef said, but the Arab League preference is for unity. He did not believe that the south could be a viable state. CDA Fernandez agreed that unity is preferable for a number of reasons, but noted that the budget of the south is larger than that of Uganda, and that most of Sudan's oil reserves are in the south. The real danger of southern secession is that it could destabilize the eastern region and north Darfur.

¶5. (C) Yousef said that the Arab League is focused on how to

best support Sudanese economic development, and that member states were discussing options to support business initiatives for both Darfur and southern Sudan. He wondered whether these initiatives should be combined or separate; CDA Fernandez opined that separate would probably be better.

¶ 6. (C) Both agreed that the Darfur situation had severely diminished the credibility of the Bashir regime. The key now is to build trust, including Bashir's confidence that the USG and international community is not simply out to get him. Yousef said that the Arab League has had problems "behind closed doors" with Bashir for a long time, but that with a more careful approach, Arab states have been able to achieve some progress recently, such as the May 2007 reconciliation agreement between Chad and Sudan brokered by Suadi Arabian King Abdullah.

¶ 7. (C) CDA Fernandez said there is a window of opportunity now, but that it may close quickly. The USG does not - as some in the Arab world might believe - view Sudan as a "case for regime change." In fact, we view Sudan along the lines of the Balkans following the break-up of Yugoslavia: a humanitarian disaster stemming from internal political strife. we expect all key actors - including Bashir - to fulfill their responsibilities in order to resolve the crisis.
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